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ABSTRACT

A critical review of literature focusing on some theoretical and methodological issues that have been generally neglected in past studies of the press's role in the making of United States foreign policy reveals that some external and internal factors may limit the capability and initiative of the press in the foreign policy area. These constraints include the following: (1) presidential control of foreign policy initiative, (2) reliance of the press on governmental information, (3) secrecy in foreign policy making, and (4) indifference of the general public to foreign policy issues. These constraints seem to make the press unable to compete effectively and successfully with policy makers in the formulation of foreign policy. One conclusion that can be drawn from the literature is that, theoretically, in the foreign policy making process, the press may be rather passive and dependent, not active and independent as is generally assumed. In addition, the review indicates the inadequacy of methods used in past studies of the press-policy maker relationship. (FL)

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The Press and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

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Paper presented to the 67th annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, Florida, August 5-8, 1984. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Doctoral Honors Seminar on Political Communication, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, April 27-29, 1984.

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The Press and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

Abstract

This paper attempts to provide a critical review of pertinent literature focusing on some theoretical and methodological considerations which have been generally neglected in past studies of the press's role in the making of U.S. foreign policy. Current literature suggests some external and internal factors may limit the capability and initiative of the press in the foreign policy area. These constraints include: presidential control of foreign policy initiative, reliance of the press on government information, secrecy in foreign policy making and indifference of the general public to foreign policy issues. These restrictions in the foreign policy environment seem to make the press unable to compete effectively and successfully with policy makers in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy. While lack of empirical evidence, one conclusion that can be drawn from the literature is that, theoretically, in the foreign policy-making process the press may be rather passive, dependent, not active, independent as is generally assumed. This paper has also looked at the inadequacy of methods in past studies of the relationship between the press and policy makers in the foreign policy area.

The Press and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

The role of the news media, especially the elite press, in the U.S. foreign policy-making process has long been recognized as an essential component. There is general agreement among politicians, students of politics and public opinion, and journalists that the news media are indispensable in developing and sustaining mass and elite public support of the U.S. foreign policy. Less certain, and one of the disagreements among political scientists, mass communication researchers and media practitioners, is the extent to which media coverage of foreign affairs influences policy makers' decisions in the foreign policy area.

Although there has been a plethora of discussion about the role of the news media in the foreign policy area (see references), there is a lack of and a need for systematic examination to clarify and qualify the relationship between the news media and foreign policy makers. The majority of past comments and observations are either impressionistic or inadequate in explaining the role and function of the news media in the foreign policy field. And there seems to be a clear distinction between political science and mass communication research in the sense that studies concerning the news media and foreign policy makers in the two disciplines seldom converge. What has been well established in theoretical framework in the political science seems to be unnoticed in the journalism research activity. The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical review of the related literature and to pinpoint some theoretical considerations and methodological issues which have been generally neglected in past studies in the field. The major research questions this paper attempts to answer are: What are the assumptions and evidence concerning the role of the news media in the foreign policy area? How appropriate are the

approaches to the study of the relationship between foreign policy makers and the news media?

A search for the literature shows there have been a limited number of empirical studies concerning the role of the news media in the foreign policy area. Some studies (e.g., Cohen, 1963; Batscha, 1975; Nimmo, 1964; Chittick, 1970) use interviews to determine how policy officials (e.g., undersecretaries, public information officers) and journalists perceive each other in the foreign policy-making process. Others (e.g., Allen, 1976; Becker, 1977; Chang, in press; Cozean, 1979; Lefever, 1974, 1976; Lewis, 1949; Myers, 1968, 1974, 1978, 1982; Stovall, 1982; Welch, 1972) use content analysis to examine how the news media present and interpret foreign policy issues. While studies of the first kind tend to suggest that the news media function as an advocate, a participant, or a catalyst in the foreign policy-making process, studies of the second kind provide a different picture in which the news media usually depend on the government for foreign policy information and go along with government policy. Since the nature of the two kinds of studies is not compatible, such results are not necessarily contradictory. Dimensions of these studies are different and need to be closely examined. What seems evident and common is that these studies (1) are limited in methodological approach, that is, an analysis of a cross-section of those officials at the middle and lower levels of the policy-making institution, or (2) are restricted in a narrow time frame and specific events, or (3) show want of a clear theoretical framework in defining the relationship between policy makers and the news media as a whole. For one thing, what the top policy makers such as the President or Secretary of State actually do has been largely left unexamined and what eventually passes through the organizational gatekeeping pipeline of the news media has not been brought into account, either. Figure 1 shows a linkage model of policy makers, mass media, and public opinion in the

foreign policy-making process, which helps locate the different kinds of studies of the press's role in the foreign policy area.

In a recent essay of the impact of news on the making of foreign policy, Goren (1980) indicated that "there seems to be little evidence to warrant a description of media personnel engaged in the coverage of foreign policy matters as independent actors in the process of policy formation." Bullion (1983) shared the same observation that the news media's roles as actors in the diplomatic domain "have rarely been qualified." Obviously, there is a need for further systematic investigation of the relationship between the news media and foreign policy makers before we can be more confident in delineating the role and function of the news media in the process of U.S. foreign policy-making. The following discussion will focus on the external and internal factors in the U.S. foreign policy environment in light of issues and assumptions that are related to the operations of the news media.

Theoretical Considerations

One of the fundamental assumptions of the American democracy is that the people know best. It is assumed and widely accepted that the public will ultimately decide what policies the government should take about the issues that have a bearing on the people's interests such as social welfare, medical care and the like. Public consent is considered the basis of popular government of the United States. Its essential requirement, among others, is that the public be fully informed of the government's activities so that the citizens can form opinions on political issues that will affect their way of living and, through elections or other means, will carry out their duties as a voter and an active participant in public affairs. This process is important. As Gerbner (1967: 435) put it, popular self-government is possible only when citizens "can collectively create policy alternatives rather than only respond to them." It follows then, as the eyes and ears of the public or as a

watchdog, the news media have the right and duty to serve as an extralegal check on government (e.g., Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956:56) or to be an adversary of the government (e.g., Moyers, 1960:36; Rivers, 1970; Pool, 1976).

There is no doubt that in the area of domestic affairs, the news media are a common source of political knowledge, a major forum for national debate and an important link and conduit between the public and policy makers. According to Nimmo (1964: 210), like political parties, bureaucratic structures or interest groups, the news media are channels of political communication connecting the citizens and officials.. Terms used to describe the press like the "opinion makers," (Rivers, 1967) the "king maker," (Robinson, 1974) the "fourth branch of government," (Cater, 1959) the "shadow government," (Rivers, 1982a) and the "other government" (Rivers, 1982b) all clearly suggest the importance of position and the power of the news media in the American political hierarchy and social structure.

In the field of foreign affairs it is yet uncertain whether and to what extent the news media enjoy the similar status as in the domestic affairs area. To Reston (1967a: 45), in domestic affairs, "it may be true that the influence of the press is so great;" but in the area of foreign policy, this concept of an all-powerful press seems to be "out of date and wildly inaccurate." Current literature in pertinent areas of study suggests some factors are likely to limit the capability and initiative of the press in the foreign policy area, thus decreasing its efficiency and effectiveness as a watchdog over government's foreign relations and activities or as a competitor. The recent U.S. invasion of Grenada and overthrow of the Marxist regime is a good case that illustrates how the press can be easily excluded from participating in the government's foreign or military operations. Althogh the press protested the Reagan administration's decision to restrict press coverage, it could virtually do nothing to challenge and change the government's position. What is

worth noting is that the public found no fault with the exclusion of the news media from covering the invasion (Sperling, 1983).

The following factors seem to place constraints on the news media in the U.S. foreign policy-making process: presidential control of foreign policy initiative; reliance of the news media on government information, especially during a foreign policy crisis; secrecy in foreign policy-making; and the indifference of the general public to foreign policy affairs. The first three factors are all related to and determined largely by the words and deeds of the government, and the last involves concern of audience interest in foreign affairs and its effect on newsgathering and production.

Presidential Control of Foreign Policy Initiative

Past studies of the interaction between foreign policy makers and the news media have generally assumed that what is true of the relationship between the two institutions in the domestic matters area is also true in the foreign policy field. They fail to recognize that power of the actors in policy areas varies according to the nature of issues involved. The separation of power on the national political stage illustrates the point. The U.S. Constitution gives the President powers of initiative in national defense and development of foreign trade (Wilcox, 1976: 37). Since World War II the importance and powers of the American presidents have been intensified by the emergence of the U.S.S.R. as a world power and the increasing complexity of issues such as nuclear arms buildup in the international area. Students of foreign affairs and international politics agree that as a national and free world leader the American president commands a tremendous power in dealing with issues that concern the U.S. national security and its relations with other countries (e.g., Radway, 1969: 50-54).

Aaron Wildavsky (1975) argued in his classic study, "The Two Presidencies," that the United States has one president, but two presidencies; one is concerned with domestic matters and the other with foreign and defense policy. According to this distinction, in the domestic area there are many rivals that compete with the president in the making of public policy, rivals such as the Congress, political parties, the news media, bureaucrats, business, interest groups and so on. The president has to consider all these elements in the formulation of public policy if he is going to have success in the conduct of domestic policy.

In the field of foreign policy, however, concern of national interests and security inevitably places the president above all the competing groups (e.g., Reston, 1966a: 50, 1966b, 1967: 187; Nimmo and Ungs, 1969: 410; Spanier and Uslaner, 1978: 9-11; Van Der Slik, 1983). With the power of his office unmatched by any other institutions and the easy access to the national news media of communication not readily available to his peers, the American president is undoubtedly the "ultimate decision maker" of foreign policy (Cornwell 1959; Johnson and Walker, 1964: 272; Hilsman, 1971: 18; Katzenback, 1973; Kranz, 1975; Balutis, 1976; Grossman and Rourke, 1976: 457; Nimmo, 1978: 203; Willard, Isaacson and Meagher, 1979: 41). Thus it is not surprising that the general public is much more dependent on the President in foreign policy affairs than in domestic matters, expects him to act in foreign affairs and rewards him with their confidence (Wildavsky, 1975). Following Wildavsky's theoretical framework, some recent studies have provided evidence supporting the theory of two presidencies. Lee (1980, 1983), for example, found that in both 1976 and 1980 party activitists offer more trust in the President in foreign affairs than in domestic matters.

Studies of the relationship between the news media and the presidency or the executive branch of government have also shown that the latter has advantages

over the former in their interaction (e.g., Wicker, 1978; French, 1982; Gans, 1983). One line of arguments is that in certain areas of policy, most notably foreign affairs, the president's ability to determine what news he will exchange for publicity is almost unlimited (Grossman and Rourke, 1976: 457-458). Reston (1967b: 186) once said that the press "may report the news, but the President makes it." Such presidential control of foreign policy initiative offers an explanation for the phenomenon that in the foreign affairs area the press tends to become a transmission belt of government policy, or even allows itself to be used by policy makers to achieve their goals (e.g., Johnson, 1974: 169).

While it occasionally has direct access to the president, the press is by no means closer to the operation of the foreign policy-making circle which consists of only a very few high-ranking officials in the executive branch of government with the president having the final word. On the contrary, in Spanier and Uslaner's model (1978:91), the news media stand at the periphery of the foreign policy decision-making circle and generally play a supportive role in policy formation (see Figure 2). In this sense, it is debatable whether the news media really participate in the making of foreign policy.

Reliance of the Press on Government Information

In the domestic affairs area, in addition to government information there are many other sources which can and are willing to provide the press with independent and competing information and views. Through these outside sources the press can frequently verify the accuracy and reliability of the news disseminated by the government. In the foreign policy field, however, the executive branch of government is basically the root, and quite often the only source, of information concerning U.S. foreign relations, thus putting opponents of administration policy

at a bargaining disadvantage (e.g., Welch, 1971; Rourke, 1972; Sigal, 1975: 86; Becker, 1977; Willard, Isaascon and Meagher, 1979; Goren, 1980). According to Rourke (1961: 197-198), "its ability to trade on the hunger of the communications media for news about public affairs -- a hunger that only government can, in many areas, gratify" -- is the real strength of government in the communications process. If that is the case, the strength of government in the foreign policy area should even be more substantial than in the public affairs field. It can be expected that not only do reporters "too easily become dependent upon official news sources" (Nimmo, 1978: 198), what the government will provide can also be decisive in "how, even whether, a story is written" (Trattner, 1982). This is particularly true in a crisis. While in the domestic area journalists can conduct investigative reporting, in the foreign affairs field their newsgathering activities are restricted by the very limited voices within government and lack of rival sources outside the government policy-making circle.

Dependence of the news media on government information can take many forms. In one way or another these governmental information-giving devices, both formal and informal, will affect the way the news media present and interpret foreign policy issues. There is a strong possibility that the president can set the agenda for the news media through the use of different devices in the foreign policy design (e.g., Paletz and Entman, 1980; Ostman and Babcock, 1983). The following are the most common channels used by the government to deliver policy messages to the news media, the public, Congress as well as foreign elite audience: press conferences, interviews, background information, press releases, speeches, handouts, leaks and briefings (Cohen, 1963: 170-179; Mickleson, 1972: 153; Rainey, 1975: 105-106; Strouse, 1975: 19; Nimmo, 1978: 208; Wallach, 1982).

Reliance of the news media on these channels in their coverage of foreign affairs thus gives policy makers the initiative, and perhaps temptation, to make and manage news. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once admitted that he sometimes exploited the press to accomplish policy goals (Hickey, 1983). Some journalists seem to have no objection to news management (e.g., Backer, 1964). Hohenberg (1968:12), for one, considered it "a legitimate and often necessary part of the orderly processes of government." Officials use these techniques for various reasons: to advance alternative policy, to promote personal position in the policy-making circle, to rally public support or simply to kill those policies they don't like. Other purposes are more subtle: to apply diplomatic pressure on the countries concerned, to raise or alleviate public concern, both foreign and domestic, over sensitive issues such as nuclear arms deployment and to test the applicability of new action and policy. No matter what motives are behind the use of these channels, policy makers will attempt to give their version on foreign policy issues and to influence what is printed or spoken on the airwaves.

By using different devices under varying circumstances, policy makers in the government are then able to bring foreign policy reporters to their side as cooperators rather than competitors (e.g., Thomson, 1974: 92; Locander, 1979; Grossman and Kumar, 1981). That is probably what the executive officials think of the news media. Rourke (1972: 33) observed that executive officials view the "proper role" of the news media in foreign affairs as an instrument through which the government can transmit message to the public. There have been many vivid examples in the past which demonstrated how reporters were being used by officials in the area of foreign policy-making (e.g., Davison, 1975).

Secrecy in Foreign Policy Making

A potent weapon (Grossman and Rourke, 1976; Paletz and Entman, 1980), secrecy takes two forms in the government's exchange with the news media: classification of government documents and withholding information. The use of secrecy in the foreign policy area is more intriguing than other devices employed by the government to manipulate or control the flow and interpretation of information (e.g., Wise, 1973: 196-238). The government more often has legitimate reasons: premature publicity may jeopardize diplomatic negotiations in progress or risk the lives of the people involved and affect national security (e.g., Ford, 1981; Weisman, 1982).

To be effective, secrecy requires that number of participants in the making of foreign policy be reduced to a minimum and limited to only those top-ranking, responsible officials such as Secretaries of State and Defense, and advisers to the President. Access to the secret information of foreign policy issues is then denied to the lower level officials, even the public information officers. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's 1971 secret China trip is a good example in which the news media are informed of the trip only after it is completed.

From another perspective, the need of secrecy enhances policy makers' position vis-a-vis the reporters' stand in their never-ending dispute over the extent of publicity in the government's conduct of foreign policy. More often than not, through the use of secrecy, foreign policy makers are able to effectively keep reporters at a comfortable distance, until the time is ripe for disclosure or when there is a need for political maneuvering such as application of diplomatic pressure. Generally, it is difficult, if not impossible, to successfully challenge the government's right to classify information in the name of national interests and security (Hohenberg, 1968: 112).

Even when reporters learn of secret information about foreign policies, in the cause of national security policy makers can, and often do, persuade reporters not to publish the story. In the face of secrecy, or if national interests are said to be "at stake," foreign policy reporters have not much choice. They can insist on the people's right to know and risk the consequences of "rocking the boat." They can, of course, go along with policy makers' request and remain silent, feeling that national interests have been served. The latter is much easier to do when there is no way of knowing whether national interests or security are really at stake in the increasing complexity of international negotiation or confrontation. Whether reporters should side with the government at the expense of the public's right to know is often a question in debate (e.g. Manning, 1964; Manning, 1968: 154). In the past foreign policy reporters have shown their willingness not to publish certain stories at the government's request, indicating that policy makers can successfully dissuade reporters from publishing information the government hopes to withhold. The invasion of Bay of Pigs is a case in point. At that time editors of the *New York Times* learned the government was planning an invasion of Cuba. After President John Kennedy discussed the need of secrecy with the *Times* and suggested that it would serve the national interests not to disclose the plan, the *Times* obliged. The invasion was disastrous and resulted in a loss of prestige to the U.S. government. Later, Kennedy said if the press had printed the story, it would have saved the United States from the consequences of the fiasco (Reston, 1967: 31; Minor, 1970: 15). Today, it is difficult to evaluate whether secrecy or publicity would have served the nation best. The point is, in Wildavsky's (1975) argument, the need for secrecy in some aspects of foreign policy-making process further restricts the ability of others, including, of course, the news media, to compete with the government. And when journalists are provided with major secret information, in Epstein's (1974) viewpoint, they become "agents for the surreptitious source" in

the sense that they are being used to serve some policy goals.

Indifference of the Public to Foreign Policy Affairs

For national leaders, particularly the president, the public constitutes a constituency. Students of public opinion have found there are differentiations within the public in its attention to policy issues. In the foreign policy area, the general public is considered either indifferent to or ignorant of policy issues (e.g., Hero, 1959). As Cohen (1963: 66-67) once indicated, "foreign affairs news is not one of the main attractions in the press so far as the public as a whole is concerned." Those who pay close attention to political issues are the so-called attentive public (Rosenau, 1961:33). Although indirectly related to newsgathering activities, indifference of the general public also has an effect on the media coverage of foreign affairs news. For one thing, many editors may simply ignore most of the foreign affairs issues as they are generally more complicated and further removed from the daily experience of the general public than are the domestic matters.

What is the size of the attentive public? There is no definite answer. Students of public opinion tend to agree that only a very small portion of the adult population falls into this group. Rosenau (1961: 40) estimated the attentive public is probably no larger than 10 percent of the population. Key (1967: 546) made it at 10 to 15 percent of the adult population. Regardless of the size of the attentive public, what is certain is that a majority of the public show little or no interest in foreign policy news.

Because of lack of interest from the general public, and consequently, no strong public arousal, foreign policy makers in government "may enjoy great freedom to act unchecked, or even to manipulate the flow of news to shape opinion about the matters" (Almond and Powell, 1966: 188). In a sense, foreign policy

makers need only to focus their efforts on influencing the attentive public in society and to deal primarily with a few reporters from the elite press who cover foreign policy news extensively. Within this context it seems evident that the government is in a better position to oversee its interaction with the news media in the foreign policy field than in the domestic area. Since there is usually no real public interest per se behind the press's investigation of foreign policy issues, policy makers can easily and safely bypass the press in their making of foreign policy decision. Exclusion of the news media from covering the Grenada invasion is only a recent example. From the standpoint of the news media, failure to cover foreign policy news effectively and comprehensively may be readily justified on the ground that the public is not interested anyway. Such a perception of the public's indifference may give the government strong temptation to limit the working range of the news media in the foreign policy field.

These restrictions on the press's capabilities and initiative in the foreign policy area do not necessarily decrease the importance of its role and function. The news media are a source of the public's knowledge of foreign affairs, a link between government and those people who follow world affairs, a measure of public opinion to policy makers, an informal channel between governments and a standard source of factual information about foreign relations to American diplomats abroad as well as decision makers in Washington. Some earlier observers have noted that the press is "a factor in international relation," (Douglass and Bomer, 1932) has "diplomatic implications," (Coggeshall, 1934) and plays "an important role in every international dispute" (Stowe, 1936). Because of the rapid development of communication technologies, the interdependence of countries on one another and the emergence of nuclear arms as well as the increasing complexity of international negotiations, the role and functions of the news media have become more essential

today than ever before in the foreign policy area.

The Press as A Source of Foreign Affairs Information

There is little doubt that, for most of the general and elite public, their knowledge about other countries and the U.S. foreign relations comes from the mass media of communication (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1979: 229). Various public opinion polls and many audience studies over the past years have all come to the same conclusion. For example, one study found that for most issues, especially foreign policy affairs, the news media are the leading source of information and ideas for the American leaders (Weiss, 1974). Cohen (1963: 13) said it best that reporters and editors, not the cartographers, draw the political map of the world for most of us.

The effect of the news media in such a capacity may be, among others, that of agenda-setting for the public (e.g., Dunn, 1969:164; Shaw, 1979; Cook et al., 1983). Considering the source, the agenda-setting paradigm, however, has been less successful in delineating how "policy choices are cast in ways to shape news agendas" and "how symbols circulated in the media are created and planted by policy officials" (Nimmo, 1979).

The Press as a Link between Government and the Public

The press not only reports what the government is thinking and doing in the foreign policy area to the mass and elite public, but also carries results of public opinion polls on foreign affairs issues, public's reaction to government's policy in news columns, and letters and articles of the readers and experts commenting on different foreign matters. In this way the press becomes a major linkage connecting the government and the public in the world of foregin policy. As Cohen (1965:

194) noted, the press is a continuous link between the policy makers and those people who follow the world affairs. This role and function of the press make the public's feedback to government possible on a daily basis.

The Press as a Measure of Public Opinion

The equation of the press with public opinion is common among politicians (Cohen, 1957: 110; Elder, 1960: 141; Cohen, 1961; Cohen, 1963: 233; Dunn, 1969a: 167; Dunn, 1969b; Chittick, 1970: 182; Cohen, 1973: 107-108; Davison, 1976; Grossman and Rourke, 1976; Nimmo, 1978: 403; Kegley and Wittkopf, 1979: 230-232; Lang and Lang, 1983:24). The reason is simple: public opinion polls on foreign affairs issues are not readily available for the policy makers when they need to assess how the public will react. On a day-to-day basis the best available indicator of overall public opinion is thus the content of the press. The press at least provides policy makers with some image of public opinion (Cohen, 1965: 200). However, studies of the relationship between newspaper content and public opinion data have provided mixed findings. Brody and Page (1975) and Miller, Goldenberg and Erbring (1979) suggested that there is a linkage, while Braestrup (1978: 505) indicated no evidence of a direct relationship.

The Press as a Channel between Governments

When official diplomatic channels do not exist between two countries, or when official exchanges are not desired, the news media can take the role as channel of the so-called public diplomacy (e.g., Peacock, 1976). It can serve as a diplomatic instrument of one government talking to the other without going through the official facilities (Dovifat, in Douglass and Bomer, 1932; Cohen, 1963: 198; Reston, 1966: 65; Chittick, 1970: 114; Davison, 1974a; Davison, 1974b; Davison, 1975; Wilcox, 1976: 51). The "Cronkite Diplomacy" is a good, though rare, example in

which televison became the medium for the nearly direct message between leaders of both Egypt and Israel in many years (Kaiser, 1977; Safire, 1977). There should be no surprise that other countries pay close attention to the elite press coverage of issues concerning their own countries (e.g., Parachos and Rutherford, 1983). For all countries, both authoritarian and democratic, surveying the news media for clues from other nations is clearly a common practice in the diplomatic world.

The Press as a Supplemental Source of Diplomatic Information

Most of the government's information about foreign relations is generally gathered through diplomatic and intelligence channels. Sometimes, however, for a variety of reasons the official reports from diplomatic agencies or bureaucratic staff may not be as complete as they should be or may be delayed in the transmitting process. Press coverage of foreign policy matters then becomes an auxiliary to official channels, allowing policy makers to view other aspects of the matter (Dunn, 1969) or scan quickly what is happening around the world (Cohen, 1963: 210; Davison, 1974; 1976). The circulation of *Current News*, a collection of newspaper articles from the major dailies, within the top government offices is an indication of the usefulness of the press as a daily source of information and ideas (New York Times, 1983).

While lack of empirical evidence, one conclusion that can be drawn from the previous discussion is that, theoretically, the structure of foreign policy environment seems to place the press at a disadvantage position, making it unable to compete effectively and successfully with policy makers in the making of foreign policy. In the process the press may be rather passive, dependent, not active, independent as is generally assumed.

Methodological Considerations

One of the main concerns in the study of the press's role in the foreign policy-making process is that of observation and data collection on which analysis and generalization are based. Although some earlier studies (e.g., Cohen, 1963; Chittick, 1970) have conducted interviews with policy makers in the area of foreign affairs, it is apparent that direct access to the top foreign policy makers, especially those in the inner decision-making circle, is usually not readily available to researchers. Research tools such as interview, questionnaire and personal observation are also restricted in availability as well as feasibility in studying the relationship between the press and foreign policy makers from a longitudinal perspective. According to Holsti (1967: 109), if we want to assess foreign policy makers' attitudes, values and "definition of situation" at the time of decision, the best we can do is an ex post facto examination of the documents written at the time of decision which remain as the single most important source of data. Content analysis is then a useful tool.

While it is true that reporters and policy makers all have a bearing on each other's perception of the policy issues in their daily interaction, it is the output of the news media and government decision that is more likely to have a greater impact on their relationship. For one thing, it is the end results of the two institutions, particularly that of the news media, to which the public is generally exposed. In this sense, the end is more important than the means in that what is done, not how it is done, may set the boundaries and priorities of public attention and discussion. This is not to underestimate the importance of other research methods such as interview, questionnaire, or personal observation in the study of relationship between the news media and foreign policy makers. Studies using these techniques have provided important insights into the daily exchange between policy officials

and the reporters who cover them. But these studies usually look at the role of a cross-section of individuals in the process of foreign policy making and tend to ignore what is actually produced, which may be more significant in assessing the contribution of the news media to foreign policy-making from a long-term perspective. Researchers have found that not only will the values of news reporters and the routinization of newsgathering influence all aspects of news as the final product (e.g., Gans, 1979: 39-69; Tuchman, 1979), but also the decisions of gatekeepers (White, 1950) may override the efforts individual reporters put into their newsgathering activities. Since there is a lack of systematic examination of and comparison between the output from both sides, methods other than content analysis obviously do not measure whether and to what extent the final press performance conforms to the outlines of official foreign policy or instead defines and narrows the range of the choices for policy makers. Figure 1 illustrates the point.

On the other hand, with a respect for the journalism profession and a higher status among their peers (Cohen, 1960; Thayer, 1972), and equally important, because of the obstrusive nature of interview (Webb et al., 1966: 21), it is likely and can be expected that when interviewed, foreign policy reporters may consider themselves an adversary of government or an independent observer and will dismiss any suggestion that they are dependent on government information or supportive of government policy. Given their validity, studies of attitudes "do not necessarily predict behavior" (Rivers, Miller and Gandy, 1975: 223). Careful analysis of the press content and positions may reveal a different picture in which the press as a whole may go hand in hand with the government. As far as the output is concerned, it is obvious that the press content is a better indicator of the relationship between the press and foreign policy makers in the U.S. foreign policy-making process. As Gerbner (1964: 478) observed, any process may be

seen as a patterned exchange between systems; we can make inferences about the systems' relationships to one another through obervation of stages, outcomes or consequences of the exchange. In the exchange between the news media and government the outcomes are, of course, the media content and government decision, which have always been the source of tension between the two institutions. What the past studies have failed to consider is a comparison of the media content with government documents, which should enable us to determine the extent to which the two insitutions converge or diverge in the process of foreign policy-making. A combination of institutional analysis and content analysis in this area would be fruitful. However, there are still problems in such a research design. In a cross-section study those major policy officials may not be allowed to comment freely on how foreign policy decisions are reached within a certain period of time. Even when policy officials are free to talk about the formulation of foreign policy, the narrow time frame and specific events are inadequate in depicting the ongoing and cumulative nature of interactions between the news media and foreign policy makers. In a longitudinal study, as mentioned earlier, access to the policy officials involved and reliability of response from those officials will be questionable.

Another concern in the study of the press's role in foreign policy-making is that of definition and operationization. What is foreign policy covergae in the news media? Is foreign news foreign policy news? The answer is no. A distinction between foreign news and foreign policy news is necessary. A confusion of the two will pose problems in illuminating the role of the news media in the foreign policy-making process.

There is no denying that coverage of foreign news is of importance to policy makers and the general public. It creates, for example, images of foreign countries and cultures in the minds of the American people. A growing body of

literature has already provided evidence concerning how the American news media cover foreign or international news. In terms of foreign policy, or foreign affairs, coverage, of the limited empirical studies in this area, most have failed to define operationally what is meant by foreign policy coverage in their studies and how a news story is qualified for inclusion into the analysis. There seems to be a loose concept as to what constitutes foreign policy news in the news media. Terms such as "international news," "international affairs," "world affairs," "world news," "foreign affairs," and "foreign news" are often used interchangeably and assumed to denote foreign policy coverage in the news media (Morris, 1976: 16). This is, however, a major methodological problem in the study of the press's role in the foreign policy field.

By definition, any government's foreign policy involves activities of diplomacy, defense or military operations abroad, and general relations such as trade, travel and culture exchange with allies or adversaries. To Hermann (1972: 72), foreign policy consists of discrete governmental actions which "are intended by the decision makers to influence the behavior of international actors external to their own policy." It then follows that definition of foreign policy coverage in the news media should be concerned primarily with what the government has done, is doing or will do in dealing with its foreign relations. Using the term "diplomatic reporting," Trattner (1982: 103) indicated that foreign policy coverage is distinct from general foreign news, which "involves the relationships among nations and their efforts to make their way in the world and manage the problems this presents." It is therefore obvious that inclusion of any "international," "foreign," or "world" news into the study of foreign policy coverage is mixing apples with oranges and may lead to misinterpretation of the role and function of the news media in the process of foreign policy-making. Some researchers (Cohen, 1963:

10; 1967: 198; Davison, Shanon and Yu, 1980: 36) have noted that not all of foreign news is relevant to foreign policy questions of government's interest. Cohen (1963: 10) has alos indicated that "a large part of what is properly called 'foreign news' is not, strictly speaking, foreign policy news -- i.e., it does not deal with foreign policy or international affairs." Coverage of an earthquake in China is a case in point and news report of Indochinese refugees at sea would be another.

In short, a distinction has to be made between coverage of foreign news and that of foreign policy. On the whole, the former looks at how foreign countries are portrayed in the news media, while the latter examines how the government's reaction to and interaction with other countries are reported in the news media. From another perspective, source of news for the first type generally has a foreign dateline, while that of the second type is usually domestic- originated. It is in the latter case that the government's foreign policy decisions are more likely to be evaluated and criticized by the news media. In the United States, source and the bulk of foreign policy news clearly come from the White House, State Department, Department of Defense, or the Congress (Cohen, 1967: 199; Chittick, 1970: 64; Graber, 1980: 254), not from outside the country.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper has looked at some external and internal factors that may undermine the press's role and function in the foreign policy- making process. These factors include presidential control of foreign policy initiative, reliance of the press on government information, secrecy in the foreign policy-making and indifference of the general public to foreign policy issues. Past studies have generally assumed, explicitly or implicitly, that by asking questions foreign policy reporters are in a position to influence government's decision in the foreign policy making. They

fail, however, to recognize that foreign policy formulation is usually in the hands of a very few actors in the policy decision circle. What counts as the U.S. foreign policy and commits the United States in its foreign relations is the words and deeds of these few actors such as the President or Secretary of State, not the officials at the lower level of policy hierarchy. When other countries are concerned about unattributed foreign policy news in the American press, for example, it is normally the President or Secretary of State, or their spokesman, who has to clarify or deny the controversial report. That clearly is an indication of who the major decision makers are in the foreign policy area. Failure to examine the initiative power and the ultimate decision of the top policy makers misses the most important dimension of foreign policy making, thus weakening our understanding of the role of the news media in the process.

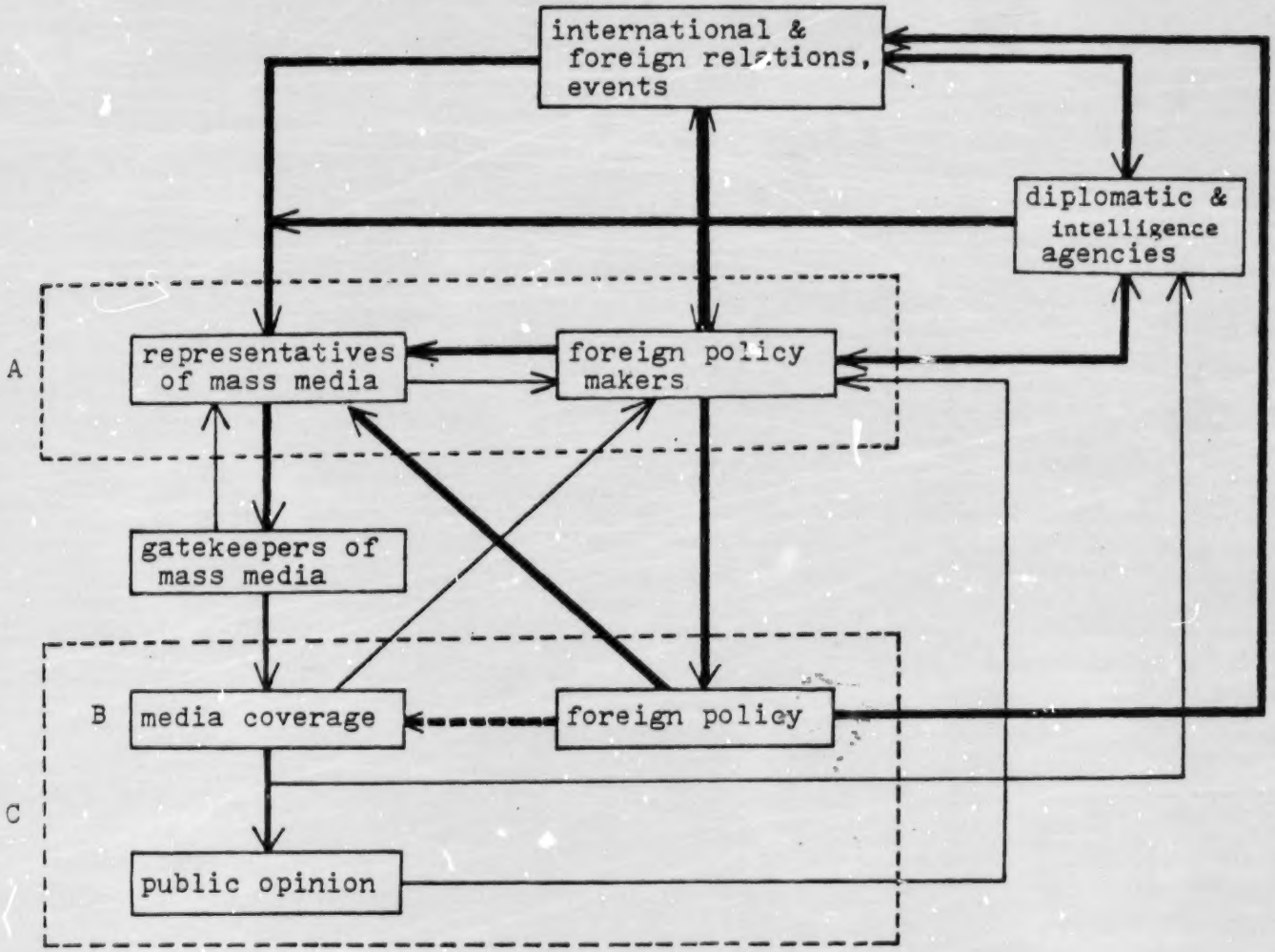
What are the implications of the structural constraints on the press's role in the foreign policy area? First, review of pertinent literature suggests what is true of the relationship between policy makers and the press in the domestic matters area may not be necessarily true in the foreign policy field. It is inappropriate, if not inadequate, considering the structure of foreign policy environment, to approach the study of the press's role in the foreign policy-making process based on the assumptions that define and explain the roles of government and the press in the domestic field. Dimensions of the conduct of foreign policy are more complicated than those of public policy. Second, on the foreign policy stage, there are only a very few leading actors such as the President with guaranteed showing time and appearance opportunity unmatched by the entire supporting cast sharing the stage. The press may be an actor in the unfolding, not in the making, of foreign policy issues. It is more likely that the press enters as an observer, not as a participant. At best it becomes a critic, but not necessarily an advocate, telling those

people who are interested in, yet unable to observe first hand for themselves, the U.S. foreign relations as outlined in the few actors' performances. There is no doubt a place for the press in the foreign policy area; how close it is to the center stage or the decision making circle is largely open to question, as is how active a part it is in the making of foreign policy.

This paper has also indicated the inadequacy of methods in past studies of the relationship between the news media and foreign policy makers. Being unobtrusive, content analysis technique is considered as an appropriate method in investigating the interaction between the news media and foreign policy makers. A longitudinal, systematic examination of press coverage of foreign policy issues and a comparison with government documents should enable us to test hypotheses concerning the role of the press in the U.S. foreign policy making process. It can be, for example, hypothesized that in the foreign policy area, because of some external constraints the press is more supportive of government policy than in the domestic matters field. A thirty-year study of the elite press's role in the U.S. foreign policy area has been designed to answer part of the question.

Figure 1

A Linkage Model of Policy Makers, Mass Media, and Public Opinion in Foreign Policy-Making Process

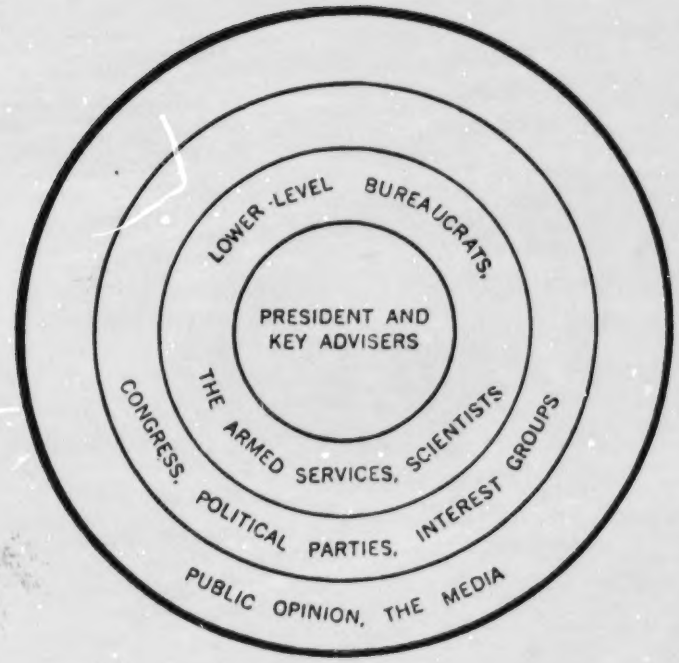


A: Area of studies represented by Cohen (1963) and Chittick (1970). In these studies policy makers involve only the middle and lower level officials.

B: Area of foreign news and foreign policy news studies.

C: Area of the present study.

Figure 2: The Concentric Circles of Power in Foreign Policy Decision-Making



Source: John Spanier and Eric M. Uslaner, How American Foreign Policy Is Made, second edition. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston/Praeger, 1978), p. 50.

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